

Sierra Nevada Conservancy tours Valley

Published on Tuesday, December 8, 2009 10:19 PM PST

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Special to the Kern Valley Sun

This week, Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) leaders spent two days in the Kern River Valley, holding its quarterly board meeting, touring the southern-most part of their region, and familiarizing themselves with the Kern Valley community. The visit began Dec. 2, when Executive Officer Jim Branham gave a morning presentation at the Kern River Valley Revitalization meeting in Kernville.

In the afternoon, the SNC board met at the Senior Center in Lake Isabella, with 1st District Supervisor and newly elected vice chairman of the SNC board, Jon McQuiston.

A major topic of discussion was California's budget crisis, which, in September, led to a freeze of all funding. Accordingly, SNC will not accept new grant proposals until the issue of funding is determined. "We are so happy that we were able to get enough funds to fulfill our commitments to our (current) grantees," said Branham.

Next on the agenda was a staff overview of assessments of each of SNC's six subregions. Spirited discussion regarding the Climate Change Action Plan resulted in the board approving the Sierra Nevada Climate Action Plan. Staff will take action to implement the plan, dependent upon securing sufficient staffing and financial resources.

On Thursday, the group gathered for brief presentations by Tom Moore, co-owner of Sierra South, and Rick Larson, Kern River District Ranger. They spoke of future projects such as building a whitewater park in Kernville and the Forest Service's upcoming plans to end free dispersed camping on the Kern River from Kernville to the Johnsondale Bridge. "Our economy rises and falls with the level of the lake and river," said Moore, "but the people are coming and loving the river to death."

The SNC board and staff then took a bus tour of the Kern Valley, which included the Nuui Cunni cultural center, where Piute Council leader Patricia Henry gave a brief presentation about the center's history and the Native American ties to the Kern Valley. The next stop was the Bob Powers Preserve, for which SNC has funded planning. The group's final stop was Audubon California's Kern River Preserve, where Outreach Director Alison Sheehey explained the history and function of the Preserve, as well as plans for the future visitor's center, another project for which SNC provided funding for planning.

Board members said they would like to see more project proposals. They also expressed the hope that the agency can remain involved in the economic development and environmental conservation in the area. "The Kern Valley is drop-dead gorgeous and has some of the same

economic challenges and disparities that I find in my own district,” said Calaveras County Supervisor and outgoing SNC Vice Chair Steve Wilensky, “There are a bunch of dedicated community members who have accomplished a lot despite many challenges. I have the utmost faith in their continued future success.”

The conservancy, which extends through the entire Sierra Nevada mountain range, encompasses 25 million acres divided into six subregions and supports 212 communities with more than 600,000 residents. To learn more about the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, visit their website at www.sierranevadaconservancy.ca.gov.